

SIGNS AND BLUNDERS: PENTECOSTAL MISSION ISSUES
AT "HOME AND ABROAD" IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY¹

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Introduction

There are several issues that come to a non-American's mind when pondering the theme of the Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in Kirkland, Washington in March 2000: "Pentecostal Missions: Issues Home and Abroad at 2000." If I may be forgiven a possible misinterpretation here (and I am sure the organizers did not intend it to be understood this way), the choice of words does seem unfortunate. "Home and abroad" appear to indicate direction from North America to the rest of the world. "Home" suggests the safe haven, the "comfort zone" and "civilization" from which missionaries ventured, and "abroad" is the fearful, exotic and dangerous margins, the "uttermost parts" of the "uncivilized" world to which dauntless (white) North Americans went. Although they may be stretching the case somewhat, Brouwer, Gifford and Rose's *Exporting the American Gospel* may not be too far off the mark in this discussion. US Americans, they say, have a belief in "America's special place among nations" and "a conviction that other peoples ought to be guided and ruled by American principles, both civil and religious." Pentecostals have joined other US Christian fundamentalists in accepting "this global-political mission as part of their own program of intense religious evangelization."² Coupled with a belief

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¹ An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in Kirkland, WA, U.S.A. in March 2000.

² Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 14,

in the superiority of forms of Christianity “made in America” is a conviction in the superiority of the political and social system found in the USA. This neo-imperialism has been that which has often alienated the American missionary from local national leaders, and certainly the perceived hegemony of US economic and military muscle has not helped the negative image.

Pentecostal missionaries from other parts of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant world also saw their mission in terms of from a civilized, Christian “home” to a Satanic and pagan “abroad,” where sometimes their own personal difficulties, prejudices (and possible failures) in adapting to a radically different culture, living conditions and religion “abroad” were projected in their newsletters home. In 1911, one such British missionary expressed this fear as she wrote home from China for Anglican vicar Alexander Boddy’s Pentecostal paper *Confidence*:

Please pray for us and the people here, who are living and dying in Satan’s kingdom. His reign here is no uncertain one, but a terrible, fearful, crushing rule, driving the people to wickedness and sin such as is not dreamt of in England. It is a force which can be felt everywhere, an awful living presence.³

The view of Pentecostal “missions” as from a western “home” to a third world “abroad” is also reflected in North American Pentecostal missiological writing up to the present, with the possible exception of Dempster, Klaus and Petersen’s latest and stimulating collection, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, certainly a more mature and thoughtful example of recent Pentecostal missiology.⁴ But one has to look deeply in earlier publications to find any evidence that Pentecostal missiological reflection had gone much deeper than an adapted reproduction of the McGavran/ Wagner “Church Growth” ideology that sometimes sees the North American mission enterprise in terms of procedures and strategies that succeed in the USA. Even that courageous pioneer and doyen of Assemblies of God missiology, Melvin Hodges, author of *The Indigenous Church*, in spite of remarkable insights, could not escape the concept of “missionaries” (“us”) being expatriate, white people who had

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³ *Confidence: A Pentecostal Paper for Great Britain* 4:9 (September 1911), p. 214. The author is indebted to the Donald Gee Centre, Mattersey, England, for permission to read through their copies of *Confidence*.

⁴ *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion made to Travel*, eds. M. W. Dempster, B. D. Klaus, and D. Petersen (Oxford: Regnum, 1999).

left "home" for "abroad," in contrast to the "nationals" ("them") who must (eventually) take over the work of the "missionaries" when the ideal of an "indigenous church" is reached. Hodges sees "mission" as "the outreach of the church in foreign lands."⁵ In these and similar writings, the "objects" of mission, now the great majority of Pentecostals in the Third World, remain marginalized. They do not set the mission agenda; the rich and powerful West does that. As Ronald Bueno has reminded us, we need to consider the contribution of the "local," the "Pentecostals," if we are really to understand the "global," Pentecostalism.⁶ Even the term "globalization" can be loaded with neo-imperialist undertones. This paper illustrates these misconceptions or "blunders" from early Pentecostal missionary reports, and suggests that in at least three areas of language, history and culture, an urgent deconstruction of these presuppositions must take place.

1. Language Blunders

By 1906, the year of the Azusa Street revival, the first Pentecostals almost universally believed that when they spoke in tongues, they had spoken in known languages (*xenolalia*) by which they would preach the gospel "abroad" to the ends of the earth in the last days. There would be no time for the indeterminable delays of language learning. Early Pentecostal publications were filled with these missionary expectations. The gift of tongues was often referred to as the "gift of languages." In the first issue of Azusa Street's *The Apostolic Faith* (September 1906), the expectations of early North American Pentecostals were clear:

The gift of languages is given with the commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The Lord has given languages to the unlearned Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Zulu and languages of Africa, Hindu [sic] and Bengali and dialects of India, Chippewa and other languages of the Indians, Esquimaux, the deaf mute language and, in fact the Holy Ghost speaks all the languages of the world through His children.⁷

⁵ Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), p. 9.

⁶ Ronald N. Bueno, "Listening to the Margins: Re-historicizing Pentecostal Experiences and Identities," *The Globalization of Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), pp. 266-88 (269).

⁷ *The Apostolic Faith* 1 (September 1906, Los Angeles), p. 1.

When “the Holy Ghost fell on a preacher” at Azusa Street, reported the paper, he was able to speak “Zulu and many tongues more fluently than English.”⁸ A missionary from central Africa recognized some of the languages spoken at Azusa Street as being “dialects of Africa.” A young woman “had the gift of the Chinese tongue,” and a “rough Indian” [*sic*] from Mexico heard his language being spoken.⁹ Such accounts abound on every page; Russian, Italian, Arabic and Turkish were some of the languages given as confirmation of the recipients’ mission calling. This first issue also reported that when Alfred and Lilian Garr received the Spirit, they had “received the gift of tongues, especially the language of India and dialects”, they had both been able to speak in Bengali, and Lilian Garr had spoken in Tibetan and Chinese.¹⁰ The Spirit had apparently not revealed at the time that there were well over a thousand Indian languages, but the undaunted missionaries went off to Calcutta fully expecting to speak Bengali on their arrival. They did not and they could not, but unlike many others who returned home disappointed and disillusioned, they stayed for some time and went on to Hong Kong to study Chinese.

The next issue of *The Apostolic Faith* continued this theme. Sister Hutchins receives the gift of speaking “Uganda” [*sic*] but surprisingly, she went to Liberia. A young girl receives “the language of Africa,” a preacher’s wife begins to speak French, a missionary to Palestine testifies to speaking “eleven or twelve languages,” and a young woman speaks a “dialect in Africa” with a “perfect accent” as well as “two Chinese dialects.”¹¹ But before the next issue could be published, an event of momentous significance occurred at Azusa Street. Charles Parham came to “control” this revival and was disgusted, particularly by the interracial fellowship and the “Africanisms” he saw there. He was rejected as leader, was never reconciled with the Azusa Street leader William J Seymour, and went into obscurity and eventual disgrace.¹² The leadership of the movement passed to Seymour and took on international dimensions. The

⁸ *The Apostolic Faith* 1, p. 2.

⁹ *The Apostolic Faith* 1, p. 3.

¹⁰ *The Apostolic Faith* 1, p. 4; 2 (October 1906), p. 2.

¹¹ *The Apostolic Faith* 2, pp. 1-3.

¹² D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 182-86, 208-209.

following issues of *Apostolic Faith* in 1906 and 1907 still mention the experience of *xenolalia*.¹³ The December 1906 issue again linked the baptism in the Spirit with the ability to speak the languages of the nations. Spirit baptism not only "makes you a witness unto the uttermost parts of the earth," it declared, but it also "gives you power to speak in the languages of the nations." Pentecostal apostle to Europe, T.B. Barratt, writes here that he "must have spoken seven or eight languages...one foreign tongue after another" when he received Spirit baptism in New York. Missionary G.W. Batman, writing en route to Liberia, believes he can "speak in six foreign tongues given me at God's command."¹⁴ In fact, the next issue of *The Apostolic Faith* carried a report from Liberia that one of the missionaries from Los Angeles "had been able to speak to the people in the cru [sic] tongue." The paper continues to give testimonies of people who spoke "the languages of the nations," and there are reports of people speaking Syriac, Armenian, Chinese, Korean, English (in Norway), Italian, Hebrew, "High German," Japanese, Spanish and Latin, among others.¹⁵ The first reports from Pentecostal missionaries in the field begin to be published in the seventh (April 1907) issue of *The Apostolic Faith*, from Liberia, Calcutta and Hawaii. A report by Tom Hezmalhalch, later missionary to South Africa, of a man hearing someone speaking in "Marathi" indicates that the idea of *xenolalia* was still prevalent, but noticeably less frequently mentioned. A letter from Poona, India gives a first hand account of the Mukti revival. A missionary, Albert Norton, speaks of hearing about the revival "about six months ago" (about September 1906), and he describes "illiterate Marathi women and girls" speaking idiomatic English. Significantly, in this issue of *The Apostolic Faith* much more reference is made to

¹³ There are five instances of *xenolalia* in the November 1906 issue of *The Apostolic Faith* 3. The first is "a Swedish sister...given the gift of the English language with the understanding of the words" (p. 2), and the testimonies of Ardell Mead who received "an African dialect" (p. 3), Lucy Leatherman who spoke Arabic, Henry McLain who spoke "the Mexican language," and a twelve-year old girl who "preaches and signs in the Indian language" (p. 4).

¹⁴ *The Apostolic Faith* 4 (December 1906), pp. 1, 3, 4. This issue mentions a woman speaking "many languages, one of them being that of the Kalamath Indians" and another woman speaking in "Hindustani" (p. 1), a man who testifies that the languages at revival "are real languages," including languages of "British India," another who speaks in Kru and Italian (p. 3), a woman speaking Chinese and Japanese, and others speaking African dialects (p. 4). The January 1906 issue speaks of a mother given "the Hawaiian language" (p. 1).

¹⁵ *The Apostolic Faith* 6 (February-March 1907), pp. 1, 3, 4.

“unknown tongues” and tongues which are interpreted than in previous issues.¹⁶

One wonders how the identification of these “languages” was arrived at. Perhaps it was the sound that gave the particular clue. An analysis might reveal that Chinese is the most frequent language “spoken” in these reports, but a closing paragraph in *The Apostolic Faith* quoting from “Banner of Truth,” yields a hint at the presuppositions behind these evaluations:

There are 50,000 languages in the world. Some of them sound like jabber. The Eskimo can hardly be distinguished from a dog bark. The Lord lets smart people talk in these jabber-like languages. Then He has some child talk in the most beautiful Latin or Greek, just to confound professors and learned people.¹⁷

Reports from the field abound with hints of the frustrations these missionaries felt because they could not communicate in the languages of the people. Many resorted to spending time with other missionaries and bringing them into the experience of the baptism in the Spirit, and this became the main occupation of some Pentecostal missionaries. Alfred and Lilian Garr wrote in *The Apostolic Faith* in 1907 as follows:

Reaching the missionaries is laying the axe at the root of the tree, for they know all the customs of India and also the languages. The only way the nations can be reached is by getting the missionaries baptized with the Holy Ghost.¹⁸

From the beginning, the movement placed an emphasis on evangelism and missions. People went to Azusa Street from Europe and went back with the “baptism,” and Pentecostal missionaries were sent out

¹⁶ *The Apostolic Faith* 7 (April 1907), pp. 1, 2. There is one report from Florence Crawford about people speaking in “the African tongue” and in Italian in meetings in Oakland (p. 3), and one from Spokane where a businessman is reported to have spoken in “Holland-Dutch, Chinese and other languages” (p. 4). The eighth *Apostolic Faith* 8 (May 1907), pp. 1, 3 carries several testimonies of *xenolalia* and gives a report from Minneapolis of a woman who spoke successively in Polish, “Bohemian,” Chinese, Italian and Norwegian.

¹⁷ *The Apostolic Faith* 7, p. 4.

¹⁸ *The Apostolic Faith* 9 (June-September 1907), p. 1.

all over the world, reaching over twenty-five nations in two years.¹⁹ Frank Macchia points out:

Though the mistaken notion of tongues as divinely given human languages as an evangelistic tool was abandoned, the vision of dynamic empowerment for the global witness of the people of God...remains fundamental to a Pentecostal understanding of tongues.²⁰

Consequently, the failure of the belief in the "languages of the nations" given at Spirit baptism did not mean that all was lost. Alexander Boddy penned the prevalent optimism of Pentecostal leaders when he described the "hall-marks" of Pentecostal baptism in August 1909. The fifth "hall-mark" was what he called the "Missionary Test":

In spite of what seemed to be a disappointment when they found they could not preach in the language of the people, and in spite of mistakes made chiefly through their zeal, God has blessed, and now more than ever the Pentecostal Movement is truly a Missionary Movement. With more training now an increasing band of missionaries is in the field or going out...to preach Christ and Him crucified to the heathen people, often in very hard places, amidst terrible difficulties.²¹

2. Historical Blunders

The debate about the origins of Pentecostalism rages on in North America. Pentecostal historian Gus Cerillo suggests that there are at least four approaches to this subject, and that one theory of the complex origins of Pentecostalism cannot be emphasized to the exclusion of others.²² However, the generating stimulus of the movement from a

¹⁹ Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, pp. 212-16; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Pentecostal Origins in Global Perspective," in *All Together in One Place: Theological Papers from the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization*, eds. H. D. Hunter and P. D. Hocken (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 166-91 (176-77).

²⁰ Frank D. Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 8-29 (17).

²¹ *Confidence* 2:8 (August 1909), p. 181.

²² Augustus Cerillo, Jr., "Interpretative Approaches to the History of American Pentecostal Origins," *Pneuma* 19:1 (1997), pp. 29-52 (29-49); Robeck, "Pentecostal Origins," p. 166.

predominantly black church with black leadership, undoubtedly rooted in the African American culture of the nineteenth century, is significant. Many of the early manifestations of Pentecostalism were found in the religious expressions of the slaves and were themselves a reflection of the African religious culture from which they had been forcefully abducted. Seymour was deeply affected by black slave spirituality. Black Pentecostal Leonard Lovett says that “black Pentecostalism emerged out of the context of the brokenness of black existence...their holistic view of religion had its roots in African religion.”²³ Walter Hollenweger reminds us that “it all depends on what we consider to be the essence of Pentecostalism” in this debate. Either the essence of Pentecostalism lies in a particular doctrine of a particular experience (speaking in tongues), or else it lies in its oral missionary nature and its ability to break down barriers. For him, the choice “is not an historical but a theological one.”²⁴ Cecil Robeck also points out that Seymour and Azusa Street “played a more significant role in Pentecostal and Charismatic self-definition” than Parham’s movement had.²⁵

But for the overwhelming majority of Pentecostals in the world, this is largely an academic, western debate. Azusa Street was certainly significant in reminding North American Pentecostals of their non-racial and ecumenical origins and their ethos. A choice between Parham and Seymour is an important theological decision to make in defining the essence of Pentecostalism. The Azusa Street revival has given inspiration to black South African Pentecostals, for many decades denied basic human dignities by their white counterparts, often in the same Pentecostal denomination.²⁶ Emissaries from Azusa Street and Zion City, Tom Hezmalhalch and John G. Lake, who reported back to Seymour, founded the first Pentecostal church in South Africa, the Apostolic Faith

²³ Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 77-78.

²⁴ Walter J. Hollenweger, “The Black Roots of Pentecostalism,” in *Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, eds. Allan H. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 33-44 (42-43); Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 23.

²⁵ Robeck, “Pentecostal Origins,” p. 179.

²⁶ Allan Anderson, “Dangerous Memories for South African Pentecostals,” in *Pentecostals after a Century*, pp. 89-107 (105).

Mission, in 1908.²⁷ Henry M. Turney, who went to South Africa in 1909 and was associated with the formation of the Assemblies of God there, was an Azusa Street product.

But there were several places in the world where Pentecostal revival broke out quite independently of the Azusa Street revival and in some cases even predated it. The "Korean Pentecost" began in 1903 and greatly influenced the present dominance of the Charismatic movement in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches there, many of whose characteristic practices have been absorbed by the "classical" Pentecostal churches (like Yonggi Cho's famous Yoido Full Gospel Church) that came much later. In this context, it is important to note which movement preceded which. Korean Pentecostals are unanimous in acknowledging the contribution of the earlier revival to their own movement. Furthermore, in spite of North American missionary participation in this revival, early Korean revival leaders in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches were much more "Pentecostal" than the missionaries would have wanted them to be.²⁸ In India, the 1905-1907 revival at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Poona, in which young women baptized by the Spirit had seen visions, fallen into trances and spoken in tongues, was understood by Ramabai herself to be the means by which the Holy Spirit was creating an indigenous form of Indian Christianity.²⁹ *The Apostolic Faith* greeted news of the Indian revival in its November 1906 issue with "Hallelujah! God is sending the Pentecost to India. He is no respecter of persons." There is no mention of missionaries or of Ramabai's mission, but it suggests that there, "natives...simply taught of God" were responsible for the outpouring of the Spirit, and that the gifts of the Spirit were given to "simple, unlearned members of the body of Christ."³⁰ Another report on the revival in India is printed in *The Apostolic Faith*

²⁷ Allan Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1992), p. 23; idem, *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic Churches in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2000).

²⁸ Jae Bum Lee, "Pentecostal Type Distinctives and Korean Protestant Church Growth" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986); Young Hoon Lee, "The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Doctrinal Development" (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1996).

²⁹ Shamsundar M. Adhav, *Pandita Ramabai* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1979), p. 216.

³⁰ *The Apostolic Faith* 3, p. 1.

the following month.³¹ Pentecostal missionaries worked with the Mukti Mission for many years and Ramabai received support from the fledgling Pentecostal movement in Britain.³² However, as Satyavrata has pointed out, “the original Pentecostal outpouring” in India took place much earlier than Mukti, in Tamil Nadu in 1860 under the Tamil evangelist Aroolappen.³³ Although the Mukti revival itself may not have resulted directly in the formation of Pentecostal churches, it had other far-reaching consequences that penetrated parts of the world untouched by Azusa Street. Methodist missionary Minnie Abrams received Spirit baptism at Mukti and communicated the news with her friends the Hoovers in Chile, where the first Pentecostal revival in South America began in 1909. The Chilean movement was unconnected with North American Pentecostalism and Hoover became founder of an autonomous and indigenous Chilean church.³⁴

The Assembléias de Deus began in Brazil in 1911 as the Apostolic Faith Mission, three years before the Assemblies of God was constituted in the U.S.A. There are far more Assemblies of God members in Brazil than in the U.S.A. today, and in fact more than in any other country. Douglas Petersen has shown that in Central America (the region closest for North American missionaries), strong Pentecostal churches emerged “with little external assistance or foreign control.”³⁵ There were revivalists all over the world unconnected with North American Pentecostalism. In the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast (now Ghana), the Liberian Kru, William Wade Harris spearheaded a revival in 1914 quite distinct from the western Pentecostal movement, but with many Pentecostal phenomena including healing and speaking in tongues, the largest ingathering of Africans to Christianity the continent had ever seen. Chinese evangelists crisscrossed that vast nation with a Pentecostal

³¹ *The Apostolic Faith* 4, p. 4. A report in *The Apostolic Faith* 10 (September 1907), p. 4 by Max Woodhead from Ceylon suggests that the Mukti revival did not experience tongues until December 1906, after receiving reports from Los Angeles, but this appears to be inaccurate.

³² *Confidence* 1:6 (September 1908), p. 10.

³³ Ivan M. Satyavrata, “Contextual Perspectives on Pentecostalism as a Global Culture: A South Asian View,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 203-21(205).

³⁴ Juan Sepúlveda, “Indigenous Pentecostalism and the Chilean Experience,” in *Pentecostals after a Century*, pp. 111-34 (111-12).

³⁵ Douglas Petersen, “The Formation of Popular, National, Autonomous Pentecostal Churches in Central America,” *Pneuma* 16:1 (1994), pp. 23-48 (23).

message similar to but distinct from its western counterpart. In fact, untold thousands of Pentecostal preachers in Latin America, Africa and Asia were responsible for the spread of the Pentecostal message into the furthest corners of the globe. This was not primarily a movement from "home" to "abroad," but much more from "abroad" to "abroad." One of the greatest disservices we do the worldwide Pentecostal movement is to assume that this is a "made in the USA" product. Los Angeles becomes the "Jerusalem" from which the "full gospel" reaches out to the nations of earth.³⁶ There were in fact many "Jeruselems": Pyongyang, Beijing, Poona, Wakkerstroom, Lagos, Valparaiso, Belem, Oslo and Sunderland, among others. Pentecostalism has had many beginnings, and there are many Pentecostalisms.³⁷ Mel Robeck warns:

The entire American church needs to catch a vision that the church is truly universal, that a narrow form of nationalism, a nationalism which sees God as being only on our side, has no legitimate part in the life of the Church. The American church has been involved far too long in a mode of ecclesial existence which has been experienced as ecclesiastical imperialism by our brothers and sisters in the Third World.³⁸

This may be one of the most important reconstructions necessary in Pentecostal historiography. The 1988 edition of the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* is predominantly North American in focus, with some attention given to Europe, but the world of the great majority of Pentecostals is almost entirely absent. The editors are aware of this in their Preface, but betray their presuppositions there too: "It is necessary first to concentrate on North America and Europe, where classical Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement originate."³⁹ Did it? Of course, the editors probably did not have access

³⁶ This theme is repeated in a footnote to a recent article by L. Grant McClung, Jr., "'Try to Get People Saved': Revisiting the Paradigm of an Urgent Pentecostal Missiology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 30-51 (49 n. 11).

³⁷ Everett A. Wilson, "They Crossed the Red Sea, Didn't They? Critical History and Pentecostal Beginnings," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 85-115 (107).

³⁸ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism," *Pneuma* 9:1 (1986), pp. 61-84 (74).

³⁹ "Editorial Preface," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S. M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and P. H. Alexander (Grand

to this information in the first place. An obscure history of Pentecostalism has been taken for granted for so long that the multitudes of nameless ones responsible for the grassroots expansion of the movement have passed into history unremembered, and their memory is now very difficult to retrieve. Everett Wilson's brilliant essay on Pentecostal historiography warns us of the futility of expecting either "to find a homogeneous Pentecostal type at the beginning" or "to assume that the experience of the first set of Pentecostals provides a model for the future." He says that it is the ordinary people, people "who were not at all certain where they were going" who carried the movement through its various stages to make an impact.⁴⁰ He points out that the future of Pentecostalism lies not with the North Americans but with the autonomous churches in the third world, whose origins often predate those of the "classical Pentecostals" in the West.⁴¹

3. Cultural Blunders

Klaus and Triplett remind us that Pentecostals in the West "have a tendency toward triumphalist affirmation of missionary effectiveness."⁴² This is often bolstered by statistics proclaiming that "Pentecostals/Charismatics" are now second only to Catholics as the world's largest Christian grouping.⁴³ When this is assumed implicitly to be largely the work of "white" missions, the scenario becomes even more incredulous. The truth is a little more sobering. There can be little doubt that many of the secessions that took place early on in western Pentecostal mission efforts in Africa and elsewhere were at least partly the result of cultural and social blunders on the part of missionaries. Granted, Pentecostal missionaries can not be blamed with the same enslavement to rationalistic theological correctness and cerebral Christianity that plagued many of their contemporary Protestant missionaries. Or can they? In the

Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. vii.

⁴⁰ Wilson, "They Crossed the Red Sea," p.104.

⁴¹ Wilson, "They Crossed the Red Sea," pp. 103-4, 106, 109.

⁴² Byron D. Klaus and Loren O. Triplett, "National Leadership in Pentecostal Missions," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, eds. M. W. Dempster, B. D. Klaus, and D. Petersen (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 225-41 (232).

⁴³ Gary B. McGee, "Pentecostal Missiology: Moving beyond Triumphalism to Face the Issues," *Pneuma* 16:2 (1994), pp. 275-282 (276).

first place they were not as educated in western theology as their counterparts were. The earliest Pentecostal mission society, the Pentecostal Missionary Union of Great Britain and Ireland (PMU), constituted in January 1909, provided rudimentary training for missionary candidates, but stated that their qualifications had simply to be "a fair knowledge of every book in the Bible, and an accurate knowledge of the Doctrines of Salvation and Sanctification." That was all, except their candidates "must be from those who have received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost themselves." There was no shortage of applications, and entrance requirements became more difficult, including a required two-year training period.⁴⁴ Soon afterwards, PMU chairman Cecil Polhill referred to the problems his organization was finding with new missionaries. He said "some training was an absolute necessity" as "previous experience" had shown "the mistake and undesirability of immature workers, however zealous and spiritual, going forth to a heathen land."⁴⁵

But early Pentecostal missionaries frequently referred in their newsletters to their "objects" of mission as "the heathen,"⁴⁶ and were slow to recognize indigenous leadership. Missionary paternalism was widely practised, even if it was "benevolent" paternalism. Young PMU worker Frank Trevitt sent back this report from "dark China" in 1911, obviously identifying a treasured Chinese national symbol with the devil:

This is heathendom truly, without light or love, not even as much as a dumb beast would have. Well, we have seen much of this spirit, which truly is the "Dragon's" spirit, which is as you know, China's ensign... Oh, how one's heart longs and sighs for the coming of Christ's glorious Ensign, to be placed where the Dragon holds such sway.⁴⁷

Later on this same missionary would refer to the Tibetan Lama priests as Satan's "wicked messengers," and that "Satan through them hates Christ in us."⁴⁸ Take some further examples from Africa. There in country after country, white Pentecostal missionaries followed the example of other expatriate missionaries and kept control of the churches and their indigenous founders, and especially of the finances they raised

⁴⁴ *Confidence* 2:1 (January 1909), p. 14; 2:6 (June 1909), p. 129.

⁴⁵ *Confidence* 2:11 (November 1909), p. 253.

⁴⁶ *Confidence* 1:2 (May 1908), p. 19; 2:5 (May 1909), p. 110.

⁴⁷ *Confidence* 4:8 (August 1911), p. 191.

⁴⁸ *Confidence* 5:9 (May 1912), p. 215; 5:12 (December 1912), p. 286.

in western Europe and North America. Most wrote home as if they were mainly (if not solely) responsible for the progress of the Pentecostal work there. The truth was often that the churches grew in spite of (and not because of) these missionaries. As Gary McGee has remarked,

Historically, most Pentecostal missionaries paternally guided their converts and mission churches until after World War II (for some to the present). Ironically, in their zeal to encourage converts to seek spiritual gifts...they actually denied them the gifts of administration and leadership.⁴⁹

Early in the formation of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, founded by John G. Lake and others in 1908, African pastors were given only nominal and local leadership opportunities, the races were almost immediately separated in baptisms and church gatherings, and apartheid had become the accepted practice of the church. The same pattern pertained in all white-led Pentecostal denominations until the 1990s. Although African pastors and evangelists were largely responsible for the growth of the movement in South Africa, they have been written out of history (with the possible exception of Nicholas Bhengu).⁵⁰ It cannot be wondered that the schisms that occurred within the Apostolic Faith movement from 1910 onwards resulted in hundreds of other denominations and the creation of the largest church in South Africa today, the Zion Christian Church. These African Pentecostal churches, although perhaps not “classical Pentecostals” in the usual sense of the word, now represent almost half of the African population, compared to about 10% who belong to “classical” Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of white origin.⁵¹ A lost opportunity?

The indefatigable William Burton began his mission in the Belgian Congo in 1915, but 45 years later his Congo Evangelistic Mission was still directed by an all white Field Executive Council and had 65 European missionaries working in fourteen mission compounds. Two missionaries were killed in the Congolese war, and Burton and his missionaries were evacuated in 1960. The result of this seeming setback was that ten years later the churches left behind had more than doubled in number.⁵² Then, in Africa’s most populous nation Nigeria, the Christ

⁴⁹ McGee, “Pentecostal Missiology,” p. 279.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost*, pp. 33, 66-70.

⁵¹ Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost*, ch. 3.

⁵² Harold Womersley, *Wm F.P. Burton: Congo Pioneer* (Eastbourne:

Apostolic Church was founded in 1941 by Pentecostal evangelist Joseph Babalola, after British Pentecostal missionaries objected to Africans using the "water of life" (water that had been prayed for) in healing rituals. The African leaders in turn found the missionaries' use of quinine to prevent malaria inconsistent with their proclamation of healing. We can only wonder whether water or quinine had the upper hand in the exercise of faith in this instance. It was not a light decision for the missionaries to take, however. The biggest killers of Pentecostal missionaries who preached divine healing were malaria and other tropical diseases. William Burton struggled hard with this issue and finally decided that the facts were against him. He needed to stay alive to do what God had called him to do in the Congo and for him, this meant taking quinine. At about the same time in Ghana, British Apostolic missionaries found a large African church wanting to work with them, but the Europeans insisted that they substitute their calabash rattles used in worship (part of a well established African Christian tradition) for tambourines. The Africans apparently thought that the missionaries wanted to deprive them of their power to ward off evil spirits.

Many of these and similar struggles were evidence of cultural misunderstandings and insensitivity that could have been avoided. Chilean Pentecostal Juan Sepúlveda points out that Chilean Pentecostalism should be understood as "the emergence of a search for an indigenous Christianity,"⁵³ and he describes the "cultural clash" first between the foreign religiosity of "objective" dogma versus the indigenous religiosity giving "primacy to the subjective experience of God"; and second, between a religion mediated through "specialists of the cultured classes" (clergy) and a religion with direct access to God for simple people that is communicated through the feelings in the indigenous culture.⁵⁴ Sepúlveda illustrates the clash in the different approaches between Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries at the time, a difference he describes as between an "official," foreign culture (educated, rational, modern) and a "popular," local one (uncultivated, oral, traditional).⁵⁵ He suggests that the same clash was present within the

Victory Press, 1973), pp. 77, 113.

⁵³ Sepúlveda, "Indigenous Pentecostalism and the Chilean Experience," p. 112.

⁵⁴ Sepúlveda, "Indigenous Pentecostalism and the Chilean Experience," p. 119-20.

⁵⁵ Sepúlveda, "Indigenous Pentecostalism and the Chilean Experience," p. 124.

Methodist church, causing the eventual separation of the Pentecostals, despite their leader Hoover's protestations to the contrary. He describes Chilean Pentecostalism's ability "to translate the Protestant message into the forms of expression of the local popular culture," by the use of nationals in leadership and ministry, and by a "dynamic of rejection and continuity" with popular culture. He shows that both popular forms and meanings are preserved in Pentecostalism, and this way it has become an "incarnation" of the gospel in the culture of the *mestizo* lower classes.⁵⁶

Sometimes Pentecostal missionaries found conditions in the "field" quite intolerable. A missionary writing from Berbera, Somaliland to his British supporters in 1908, probably expressed the pent-up feelings of many:

The great majority of the people here are Mahommedans [*sic*], and very ignorant and superstitious, and poverty reigns supreme among thousands of them. Lying, stealing, and begging are the principal occupations of the poor class, and they do not think it any disgrace to have it known.⁵⁷

It seems that this particular missionary did not send any further letters after this picture of hopelessness. Early missionaries were sometimes patronizing and impolite. One woman, writing from Mbabane, Swaziland in 1911, spoke of the work among "the native boys," quickly explaining that "all [African males] are called 'boys'— from infancy to grey hairs." Another Pentecostal missionary in Johannesburg writes of the "Holy Spirit coming down on these black boys [mine workers] in such power."⁵⁸ Two British missionary women in India wrote home in 1912 to complain about the fact that because no Europeans lived in that district "there is no house where we could live, there are only the Indian native houses."⁵⁹ A PMU missionary from Tibet likewise described Tibetan food and said, "only those who know anything about Tibetan life will fully understand how unpleasant it really is."⁶⁰ Because Melvin Hodges in his *The Indigenous Church* was writing primarily for North American "missionaries," he often struggles with the limits of identification with the culture of the receiving people. Although he

⁵⁶ Sepúlveda, "Indigenous Pentecostalism," pp. 128-9, 132.

⁵⁷ *Confidence* 1:2, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *Confidence* 4:1 (January 1911), pp. 16, 18.

⁵⁹ *Confidence* 5:2 (February 1912), p. 47.

⁶⁰ *Confidence* 5:5 (May 1912), p. 167.

castigates those who "take America" with them to the "foreign field" and decries the cultural gap between the lifestyle of the (American) "missionary" and that of the "national," what he says thereafter is revealing:

Whether the national recognizes it or not, it would be almost a physical impossibility for the missionary, with his wife and children, to adjust to native food and housing conditions.... The man of average constitution finds it necessary either to live on a higher scale than the nationals, or to discontinue missionary work. Furthermore, it is only fair to the missionary's children to rear them in an atmosphere that will familiarize them a bit with American culture, so that when they return to the homeland they will not be misfits.⁶¹

Gary McGee quotes an Assemblies of God missionary in Burkina Faso who said that although the Mossi people were "mentally inferior to other tribes," they could "be trained to a very satisfactory degree."⁶² Although not all missionaries could be credited with such blatant racism, up until the last decade of the twentieth century, "Missionary Field Fellowships" and other closed clubs of expatriate Pentecostal missionaries have so controlled financial resources, buildings and educational institutions that they have estranged themselves from and created untold resentment among the people they are seeking to serve.

Conclusion

The Pentecostal experience of the power of the Spirit should constitute a unifying factor in a deeply divided church and world, the motivation for social and political engagement, and the catalyst for change in the emergence of a new and better world. It was also the reason for an unprecedented flexibility on the part of its emissaries, both from "home" and "abroad," to the various cultures into which the Pentecostal message was taken. But although this has not always been recognized, an even greater omission has been to ignore the fact that most of Pentecostalism's rapid expansion in the twentieth century was not mainly the result of the labors of missionaries from "home" (North America and western Europe) to "abroad" (Africa, Asia and Latin America). It was

⁶¹ Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, pp. 121-22.

⁶² Gary B. McGee, "Pentecostals and Their Various Strategies for Global Mission: A Historical Assessment," in *Called and Empowered*, pp. 203-24 (211).

rather the result of the spontaneous indigenization of the Pentecostal message by thousands of preachers who traversed the continents with a new message of the power of the Spirit, healing the sick, and casting out demons. Pentecostal missionaries from “home” need to admit the awful blunders they and their predecessors made “abroad.” This taking stock of the past will enable better mission praxis in the future. The remaining missionary task of the church to be done in the twenty-first century must be defined, not by mission strategists and policy makers in the powerful and wealthy nations of the world, but by the people living in the world’s most marginalized parts. Only by “listening to the margins,”⁶³ by allowing the hitherto voiceless to speak, and by recognizing the contribution of those unsung Pentecostal laborers of the past who have been overlooked in our histories and hagiographies, will we together come to a honest appraisal of our world’s needs and be able to suggest solutions in the power of the Spirit and in the humility of the Cross.

⁶³ Bueno, “Listening to the Margins,” p. 268.